

Skua

Skua (*Stercorariidae* sp.) are scavenger/predatory seabirds that are closely related to gulls (Furness, 1987). In general, skua are a rare sighting as they populate remote areas and are mostly found migrating from area to area at sea (Furness, 1987). Within this research's investigation area, Skua can be found almost exclusively in the northern parts of the North Sea (Camphuysen & Ijzerdoorn, 1988; Furness, 1987; O'Hanlon et al., 2024; Votier et al., 2003). This study identified a total of 3 species of Skua that inhabit the North Sea, which are: Great Skua (*Stercorarius skua*), Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*), and Artic skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) (Camphuysen & Ijzerdoorn, 1988; Furness, 1987; O'Hanlon et al., 2024; Votier et al., 2003). This study found no invasive species within the North Sea.



History/ Population trends

Not much is known about the history of Skua as a Family as they were often mistaken for Gulls or Gannets (Furness, 1987). This is mostly because Skua morphologically resemble Gulls and Gannets, in both their structural features, as well as their plumage (Furness, 1987).

Furthermore, Skua are generally poorly observed and documented. However, Clark and Frid found a decline in chicks of the Great skua which they related to parents relying more heavily on discards from fishery instead of their natural foraging behaviour (2001). Additionally, Clark and Frid mentioned that a decline in small pelagic fish, such as Sandeel (*Ammodytes* sp.) and Sprat (*Sprattus sprattus*), would result in the decline of many different seabird species (2001).

Miscellaneous

- Skua are often called 'pirate birds' because of their foraging/ feeding behaviour (Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003). Many species of Skua primarily feed by way of kleptoparasitism, which means that they steal the prey caught by other predators (Furness, 1987). However, Great skua are also known to prey on small seabirds (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003).
- Unlike their close relatives the Gulls, the female Skua grow to larger sizes than males do (Furness, 1987).

Diet

- Sandeel (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003)
- Sprat (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003)
- Herring (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003)
- Mackerel (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003)
- Small fish (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003)
- Crustaceans (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003)
- Other detritivores (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003)
- Small seabirds (Clark & Frid, 2001; Furness, 1987; Votier, 2003)

Sources

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